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THE AISNE AND MONTDIDIER-NOYON OPERATIONS

WITH SPECIAL ATTENTION TO THE PARTICIPATION
OF AMERICAN DIVISIONS

Monograph No. 13

Prepared in the
Historical Section, Army War College

June, 1922

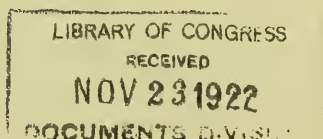


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WASHINGTON, June 20, 1922.

The following monograph, entitled "The Aisne and Montdidier-Noyon Operations (with special attention to the participation of American divisions)," prepared in the Historical Section, Army War College, is approved and published for the information of all concerned.

[A. G. 062.1.]

BY ORDER OF THE SECRETARY OF WAR:

JOHN J. PERSHING,
*General of the Armies,
Chief of Staff.*

OFFICIAL:

ROBERT C. DAVIS,
Acting The Adjutant General.

GENERAL SCHEME OF MONOGRAPHS, HISTORICAL SECTION.

(Where a title is given without special mark, the monograph is contemplated or in preparation; a title with a single * indicates a monograph completed and awaiting publication; a title with two ** indicates a published monograph.)

I. NARRATIVE HISTORY OF MILITARY OPERATIONS.

- The Major Operations of the A. E. F. (G. O. 83, W. D., 1919.)
- "Cambrai." Monograph No. 5, W. D. Doc. No. 1017, 1920.
- "Somme Defensive and Lys."
- ** "Aisne and Montdidier-Noyon. Monograph No. 13, W. D. Doc. No. 1108, 1922.
- "Champagne-Marne and Aisne-Marne."
- (a) "The 3d Division on the Marne."
- "Somme Offensive. Oise-Aisne, Ypres-Lys."
- ** (a) "Operations Second Corps in Somme Offensive. Monograph No. 10, W. D. Doc. No. 1016, 1920.
- * "St. Mihiel." Monograph No. 12.
- "Meuse-Argonne."
- ** "Blanc Mont (Meuse-Argonne-Champagne)." Monograph No. 9, W. D. Doc. No. 1010, 1920.
- "Vittorio-Veneto."
- * "Operations in North Russia, 1918-1919." Monograph No. 11.
- "Operations in Siberia, 1917-1920."
- "Operations in Italy, 1917-1918."

II. STUDIES OF SERVICES OF SUPPLY.

- ** "Organization of Services of Supply, A. E. F." Monograph No. 7, W. D. Doc. No. 1009, 1920.
- "Replacement of Personnel, A. E. F." Monograph No. 8.
- "Procurement of Supplies, A. E. F."
- "Initial Equipment and Supply, A. E. F."

III. SPECIAL TACTICAL STUDIES.

- ** "A Survey of German Tactics, 1918." Monograph No. 1, W. D. Doc. No. 883, 1918.
- ** "A Study in Troop Frontage." Monograph No. 4, W. D. Doc. No. 992, 1919.
- ** "A Study in Battle Formation." Monograph No. 6, W. D. Doc. No. 1012, 1920.

IV. MILITARY ACTIVITIES IN THE UNITED STATES.

** "Economic Mobilization in the United States for the War of 1917."
Monograph No. 2, W. D. Doc. No. 885, 1918.

** "A Handbook of Economic Agencies of the War of 1917." Monograph
No. 3, W. D. Doc. No. 908, 1919.

V. HISTORIES OF TROOP UNITS.

** "Outline History of Divisions."

** "Outline History of Regular Regiments."

THE AISNE AND MONTDIDIER-NOYON OPERATIONS.

(With special attention to the participation of American divisions.)

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1. PARTICIPATION OF AMERICAN DIVISIONS PRIOR TO THE AISNE OPERATION.

The German offensive which commenced May 27, 1918, passed the line of the Aisne River successfully and was contained only at the Marne, where American units were for the first time engaged in it (1). It is officially known, however, among the major operations in which American troops participated, as the Aisne operation (2). It was followed by the strategically unsuccessful German offensive commenced June 9, 1918, on the front between Montdidier and Noyon (3). The official American designation of this battle is the Montdidier-Noyon operation (2). A brief sketch of American participation in the war with Germany prior to the first of these operations is essential to the understanding of American participation in them.

The United States entered the war with Germany on April 6, 1917 (4).

The first American troops landed in France on June 26, 1917 (5), (6). The first American troops entered the line October 21, 1917 (7).

On March 21 the first great German offensive of 1918, which had been anxiously awaited for months, was launched in the Somme region. General Pershing's estimate of the situation at the end of 1917 was that while only an untoward combination of circumstances could give the enemy decisive victory before an American independent army could enter into the battle, a situation might arise which would necessitate the temporary use of all American troops in units of our allies for the defensive. This situation arose as the result of the success of the March 21 German offensive. Within eight days the enemy had crossed the old Somme battle field and had penetrated some 56 kilometers (8).

On March 21, 1918, the 1st Division was in sector north of Toul. The 26th Division had just been relieved from sector northeast of Soissons, where it had been brigaded with French forces. The 42d Division was in

(1) Final Report of C. in C., A. E. F., p. 33.

(2) G. O. 83, W. D., 1919.

(3) Final Report of C. in C., A. E. F., p. 34.

(4) Report of Secretary of War, 1919, p. 3.

(5) Dates of Arrivals of Divisions, H. S. files.

(6) Final Report of C. in C., A. E. F., p. 18.

(7) Battles, etc., 1st Div., H. S. 193-35.

(8) Final Report of C. in C., A. E. F., pp. 18, 19, 25.

(9) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 32, and plate 5.

the process of relief from sector east of Lunéville, where it had been brigaded with French forces. The 2d Division had just entered sector southeast of Verdun, where it was brigaded with French forces. One regiment of the 93d Division was with the French in the Argonne. The only other divisions in France were the 41st, which was used as a depot division, and the 32d, which was originally intended for a replacement division(9).

On March 28 General Pershing visited General Foch at Bombon and placed all American forces at his disposal(9).

(10) A French Study of the German Offensives in 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

(11) Final Report of C. in C., A. E. F., p. 31.

On March 26, 1918, General Foch had been agreed upon as a coordinator of the French and British operations(10). This action was confirmed by an agreement signed April 3, 1918, under which the British, French, and American Governments conferred on him all of the powers necessary to coordinate the action of the allied armies on the western front(11).

(12) History 26th Div., H. S. 226.

(13) Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

As requested by General Foch, General Pershing took the 1st Division from sector north of Toul and moved it into a reserve position back of the Somme battle front. To permit of this movement, the 26th Division relieved the 1st Division (9). Command of the sector passed to the 26th Division on April 3(12). The 42d Division was returned to a division sector southeast of Lunéville(9). The 2d Division remained in sector brigaded with the French(13).

On April 25 the 1st Division relieved parts of two French divisions on the active front near Montdidier(9).

(14) A French Study of the German Offensives in 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

By April 4, however, the German offensive, begun on March 21, had been definitely stopped and the Germans commenced diversions. On April 9 the German Army attacked in Flanders. This attack was successful and an attempt was made to exploit it, but the effort was contained by the British army, supported by French reserves. On April 24 the German attack on Amiens was renewed, but was contained by French and British forces(14).

(15) Dates of arrival of Divisions, H. S. files.

(16) Map showing operations of American Divs., G-3 files, A. E. F.

Between March 21 and the end of May a number of American divisions arrived in France and became immediately available for use in emergency. On April 6 the 3d Division arrived. On April 12 the 77th Division arrived and was initially stationed in the British area in northern France. On April 28 the 5th Division ar-

rived. Both the 3d and 5th Divisions went to training areas in the vicinity of American General Headquarters at Chaumont, around which it had been originally planned to group American forces. The next few divisions to arrive, however, were grouped back of the British forces in northern France. These divisions included the 82d, 35th, 28th, 4th, 30th, 33d, 27th, and 80th. They all arrived in May (15, 16).

America's active participation during this period was limited to the occupation of defensive sectors by American divisions already noted as being in line. The most serious sector engagement within this period was the German raid in force on the 26th Division at Seicheprey on April 20(17).

The infantry attack was preceded by an artillery bombardment, which commenced at 2.50 a. m., April 20(18). The German raiding forces, drawn from the 259th Infantry and reinforced by special storm troops, advanced at about 5 a. m. The strength of the infantry actively committed to the raid was about 1,200, although other troops were naturally engaged. The attack, delivered on a front of about 3 kilometers from the eastern edge of the Bois de Remieres west, overran the advanced troops in sector, and by about 6 a. m. penetrated into Seicheprey, a distance of over a kilometer. Here it was checked by the resistance of units of the battalion of the 102d Infantry stationed in the town. The attacking German troops were driven out of the town and retired to defensive positions just north of the town, which they held throughout this day(19).

The 26th Division was at this time under tactical command of the French 32d Corps. At 2.45 p. m., April 20, the commanding general of that corps ordered an American counterattack for that evening. The corps orders were later changed to prescribe the time for the counterattack as 4.45 a. m., April 21. The officer designated to conduct the counterattack received his orders at midnight April 20(19). He arrived at the headquarters of the regiment designated to counterattack at 2 a. m., April 21. Runners were immediately sent out to the companies designated to counterattack with orders for assembly and attack. At 4.05 a. m. two of the attacking companies were not yet in position and the commanding officer designated called off the counterattack on his own

(17) Report of
C. in C., A. E.
F., cabled Nov.
20, 1918.

(18) Report of
26th Div., Apr.
23, 1918, G-3
files, A. E. F.

(19) Letter C.
G., 51st Inf.
Brig., Apr. 27,
1918, G-3 files,
A. E. F.

(20) Report of
the 102d Inf.,
Apr. 23, 1918,
G-3 files, A. E.
F.

responsibility. Patrols were immediately sent out to clear up the situation and the commanding officer of the battalion of the 102d Infantry that had been holding the sector principally involved succeeded in reoccupying the trenches taken by the raiding party at 5 a. m. The Germans held none of the ground gained and suffered considerable losses (20). American casualties were also heavy, in the neighborhood of 400. This included 183 prisoners, whose capture was immediately reported in the German communiqué (21). Although the raid was reported as a successful operation by the German High Command, it was acknowledged that it proved the fighting ability of the American soldier (21a).

(21) Report of 26th Div., Apr. 23, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

(21a) "My War Memories, 1914-1918," Ludendorff, pp. 609, 610.

(22) Final Report of C. in C., A. E. F., p. 32.

On May 28 the 1st Division made the first American attack in which ground was taken from the enemy and held. Coming simultaneously with the successful development of the German May 27 attack, this operation had an excellent effect (22).

(23) Ordre Général No. 660, 10^e Corps d'Armée, 4 mai, 1918, H. S. files.

The attack of the 1st Division developed from a larger project. On May 5, 1918, the French 10th Army Corps had relieved the French 6th Army Corps in the corps sector in which the 1st Division was holding (23).

(24) No. 5/175, 3, 10^e C. A., 4 mai, 1918, H. B. files.

Immediately on entry into sector the 10th Corps initiated a project for a future attack by the 1st Division and two French divisions, to protect the flank of a proposed offensive of the French Third Army on the front from Montdidier east, and directed north (24). While this operation was not carried into effect, an operation planned for the 1st Division as a preliminary was. This latter operation contemplated an attack by one infantry regiment of the division, supported by the 1st Field Artillery Brigade and a heavy concentration of French artillery, and assisted by French auxiliaries, to seize and hold the heights about Cantigny (25). In approving the project of this attack, the commanding general, French First Army, contributed French Army artillery to the attack and insisted on an extreme artillery preparation (26).

(25) No. 5/2533, 10^e C. A., 4 mai, 1918, H. S. files.

(26) No. 1, 347/3, 1st Armée, 17 mai, 1918, H. S. files.

(27) French 1st Army Bulletin, June 2, 1918, Summary of Information, G. H. Q., A. E. F., June 7, 1918.

The Cantigny operation was immediately preceded by the repulse on the morning of May 27 of a small German raid by a detachment of the 272d Regiment of the German 82d Reserve Division, which held the sector opposite the 1st Division. The raid was a complete failure, and most of the detachment, including the commanding officer, were killed (27).

The American attack was made on the morning of May 28. The 28th Infantry advanced at 6.45 a. m. and reached its final objective at 7.25 a. m. It advanced from 300 to 600 yards on a front of 2,200 yards, taking the fortified village and the heights of Cantigny. It captured 5 officers and 220 men. Its material captured included two trench mortars and four heavy machine guns. The position taken was consolidated and held under very heavy artillery bombardment and in the face of numerous counterattacks (28). Total American casualties were 1,067 (28a). These losses, however, were not believed to be as heavy as those of the enemy, who, in addition to the prisoners taken, lost heavily in their defending and counterattack troops. The units engaged were the 28th Infantry; the 1st Field Artillery Brigade; the 1st, 2d, and 3d Machine Gun Battalions; Company D, 1st Engineers; 2d Battalion, 18th Infantry; a battalion of French tanks; a section of French flame throwers; and various French artillery units. The 1st Battalion, 26th Infantry, holding the sector immediately south of the 28th Infantry, also suffered from the bombardment and met and repulsed a part of the counterattack (28).

(28a) Skeleton History of Divisions, G-3 files, A. E. F.

A report made by the French liaison officer, attached to the 1st Division, immediately after the Cantigny operation, is of particular value. This experienced staff officer was close enough to the division to be cognizant of the details of its action; in fact, he had assisted in the preparations of the plans for the operation. He was far enough removed from the division to see the operation from an unprejudiced point of view (29).

(29) Statement of Capt. J. N. Greely, F. A., staff, 1st Div., May 24, 1920.

A partial translation of the report in question is as follows:

(30) Report of Liaison Officer with the 1st Div., May 29, 1918, H. S. files.

The attack of the 1st Division,¹ with three battalions of the 28th Infantry, on Cantigny took place yesterday, May 28.

The troops were put into position during the night of the 27th and 28th under favorable conditions, the enemy artillery being less active than in the preceding nights.

At 3.45 a. m. destructive fire and neutralizing fire on enemy artillery by our heavy artillery commenced.

From 5.45 a. m. up to 6.45 a. m., which was the hour of attack, the artillery engaged in the destruction took up the actual

¹ Organization of 1st Division: 1st Infantry Brigade—16th Infantry, 18th Infantry, 2d Machine Gun Battalion; 2d Infantry Brigade—26th Infantry, 28th Infantry, 3d Machine Gun Battalion; 1st Field Artillery Brigade—6th Field Artillery, 7th Field Artillery; 5th Field Artillery (heavy), 1st Trench Mortar Battery; 1st Machine Gun Battalion; 1st Engineers; 2d Field Signal Battalion; 1st Division trains and military police (31).

preparation, which consisted in a very heavy bombardment * * * with a particularly heavy concentration on Cantigny.

Throughout the preparation the enemy artillery reaction was very weak. * * * There was practically none on the jumping-off trenches. At the hour of attack, the 28th Infantry advanced in perfect formation. The battalion of tanks, which had approached without any trouble, led the attack.

The advance proceeded normally, without being troubled by the enemy artillery, which did not lay down a barrage. The only obstacles to infantry were some machine guns in the zone of attack, which were put out of action quite easily with the help of tanks, and from machine guns in position * * * to the right * * * and to the left which caused losses in the flanking battalions.

Between 7.45 and 8 a. m. the final objective was reached. The tanks withdrew without incident.

The enemy artillery, whose action had been negligible during the preparation and the execution of the attack, commenced to act more vigorously from 8 a. m.

In addition, enemy units during the morning commenced to come up the valleys. * * *

In the afternoon, the enemy fire became very intense, and at 4 p. m. attempts at counterattacks were made from the Bois de Framicourt. They were broken by the combined fire of artillery and infantry.

At the end of the day, in spite of enemy action, and the serious losses suffered by the 28th from bombardment, the conquered line had been maintained throughout.

The number of prisoners counted were 2 officers and 220 men. The enemy had had heavy losses, first by the artillery preparation, then during the attack from the American infantry and the tanks. The two battalions that occupied the front attacked—one battalion of the 271st and one of the 272d—can be considered almost annihilated.

On our side the relatively light losses during the attack had been greatly augmented during the day. At noon they were estimated at about 1,200 dead and wounded. At present the division has no exact figures on the losses suffered, but they appear quite heavy.

American infantry which attacked for the first time proved itself as dashing in the attack as obstinate in defense.

The officers of the French tanks, who saw the work of the American infantry, praised it very highly (30).

(31) Report No. 50, Oct. 30, 1918, Divisional Index files, G-1, A. E. F.

2. THE AISNE OPERATION.

On May 27, 1918, the Germans made a great attack on the Aisne front(32).

The general situation has been indicated above. Even after the losses of the Picardy and Flanders offensives, the German Army was still a powerful offensive machine(33). On May 27 the allied strength on the western front was 206 divisions, of which 116 were in line. This included 16 American divisions, some of which had just arrived(34, 35). They were approximately double the strength of the average French, British, or German division(36). The German strength was 211 divisions, of which 126 were reported in line prior to the concentration for the new offensive(34). The strength of divisions varied even in the same army, and the number of divisions can not be taken as an exact index of strength(37). British losses had been heavy and they were unable to replace them entirely. The French had extended their front to meet the emergency of March 21 and had sent reinforcements to the British during the Flanders battle. French reserves were greatly reduced(38). Both nations counted largely on the arrival of American troops to meet further German offensives(39). The principal concentration of American troops was in the British area, where seven divisions were newly arrived. There was a secondary concentration in the Lorraine training area in northeastern France(35). In general, it may be said that the moment was favorable for a great German attack, in that the Germans had secured the initiative and still disposed of large trained and formed reserves. Not only was the moment favorable, but, in view of the steady flow of American troops to France, it was imperative that a great attack should be made in order to force a decision before the balance of power on the western front passed to the Allies.

(32)Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 33.

(33)"My War Memories," Lullendorff, p. 614.

(34)French Order of Battle Map, Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

(35)Map showing operations of American Divs., Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

(36)A Study in Troop Frontage, pp. 7, 8, W. D. D. 992.

(37)Weekly Graphics of Personnel, 1918, G-1 files, A. E. F.

(38)Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., pp. 26-33.

(39)Message from Prime Ministers of Great Britain, France, and Italy, Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 28.

(40) "My War
Memories," Lu-
dendorff, pp. 614-
16.

The Aisne operation had been planned at German General Headquarters since early in April. The primary purpose was to attract allied reserves south, thereby enabling a return to the project of separating French and British Armies by a push to the channel, subsequently defeating the British Army. The German High Command hoped to reach the line of the Aisne at Soissons and the Vesle at Fismes, on which a front could be established threatening Paris(40).

(41) Relief
map, western
front, map rooms,
War College.

The Aisne front, heretofore popularly known as the Chemin des Dames front, offered favorable terrain for such an operation. Wooded country behind the German front lines served to conceal concentration. Only a short stretch of difficult country would have separated a new front on the heights south of the Vesle from the old Chemin des Dames front(41). On the other hand, the Marne salient, which was actually formed by the exploitation of success, was inherently weak(42). Between the Vesle and the Marne was a long stretch of broken highlands, sparsely inhabited and difficult for communications(41).

(42) Final Re-
port, C. in C.,
A. E. F.

The German command had concentrated artillery and munitions on this new offensive front in the weeks that had passed since the stabilizing of the March 21 offensive. The concentration had been so gradual that it obviated any unusual railway activity which might serve to indicate the coming offensive. The troop concentration was begun only on May 20(43). Previous to the concentration there were but seven German divisions in sector from just west of Reims to just west of Anizy(44). The German mass of reserve was held in the rear areas, recovering from the effect of the March 21 offensive, in which most of them had participated. They were generally in the vicinity of St. Quentin-Vevins-Sedan, from which they could readily be moved west for a fresh offensive in Picardy or south for the contemplated offensive in Champagne(43, 44). Forty-one German divisions were made available for the attack. Most of these divisions moved into the theater of operations by night marches which concealed the concentration. A few divisions were moved up by train at the last minute. Front-line and support divisions occupied designated positions on the nights of May 25-26 and 26-27, the attacking divisions moving up from only a few kilometers back of the line(43).

(43) A French
Study of the Ger-
man Offensives in
1918, G-3 files,
A. E. F.

(44) French Or-
der of Battle
Maps, Map Room
files, G-3, A. E.
F.

The plan of attack included:

(a) Attack of the German Seventh and First Armies on a front extending from Anizy to the region south of Berry-au-Bac, against the general front Soissons-Fismes-Reims.

(b) Prolongation of the front of attack; on the right across the Ailette toward the Oise, on the left, to Reims.

(c) Attack of the German Eighteenth Army west of the Oise directed on Compiègne(45). This last phase was ultimately developed into the semi-independent Montdidier-Noyon offensive(46).

(45) "My War Memories," Luedendorff, p. 615-616.

(46) Id., p. 633.

The Seventh Army (von Boehn) had a zone of attack from Berry-au-Bac northwest. It had available 25 divisions, of which 15 were in line. The First Army (von Below) had the zone of attack from Berry-au-Bac south-east. It had for the attack six divisions, three of which were in line. The remaining divisions employed were in general reserve or only made available later. The methods of concentration, preparation, and attack closely followed those which had been successful in the great March 21 offensive(43).

The plan of defense had been prescribed by French General Headquarters for this as for all other portions of the French front. It included the disposition in depth of units in defensive sectors and the stationing behind the line of reserve divisions held within striking distance of the front as counterattack elements(47). Since the attack on this front came as a surprise, no other dispositions to meet it had been made.

(47) Instruction for the Defensive Use of Large Units in Battle, W. D. Doc. No. 794.

The French command succeeded in discovering only the most indecisive indications of a great attack up to May 26. A prisoner captured on the morning of that day eventually gave convincing details of the impending attack, and the alarm was sent out by the French Sixth Army at 3 p. m. This was too late to take proper preventive measures. The imminence of the attack was confirmed by observed movements of formed German troops, as large as a regiment, close to the front at dusk(48).

(48) A Study of Indications of the German Offensive of May 27, 1918, from the French Sixth Army, Supplement to Summary of Intelligence, G. H. Q., A. E. F., July 14, 1918.

The front attacked was held by the French Sixth Army, whose sector excluded Reims but included Anizy. From east to west the holding units were the French 45th Division; British 9th Corps, including the 21st, 8th, and 50th Divisions; the French 11th Corps, including the 22d, 21st, and 61st Divisions. Available reserves were: The

(49) French Order of Battle Maps, Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

(50) London
Times History of
the War, volume
20, p. 322.

(51) A French
Study of the Ger-
man Offensives of
1918, G-3 files,
A. E. F.

French 13th Division in rear of the 45th Division, the British 25th Division in rear of British 9th Corps, and the French 157th Division in rear of the 11th Corps. Other French reserves which were more distant but still available were the 154th Division at Epernay, the 4th Colonial Division at Dormans, the 74th Division at Soissons, and the 39th Division at Vic(49). The character of this front may be seen by the fact that the British units in sector had been sent there to rest and reorganize after participation in the March 21 operation(45, 50).

The infantry attack was preceded by a comparatively short and very violent artillery bombardment. In the neighborhood of 4,000 guns were used by the attacking force. The bombardment on the most active front began at 2.40 a. m., May 27. There was a large use of gas shells, particularly directed on allied batteries, posts of command and observation, and rear areas. A rolling barrage preceded the infantry attack up to the Aisne; box barrages were also used in certain areas(51).

The formation adopted in general in the German offense was with two regiments in line and one in reserve, each regiment with two battalions in line and one in reserve, each battalion with two companies in line and two in support. At 3.40 a. m., May 27, the infantry attack of the Seventh Army commenced. On the right of the attack two divisions debouched from the forest of Pinon in the direction of Vauxaillon and Laffaux to cover the flank of the center of the attack by occupying the heights above Leully. These divisions did not obtain this objective until the end of the day. They encountered strong resistance about Chavignon and Pargny-Filain. At the cost of heavy losses they succeeded in passing the Chemin des Dames and advanced on Vailly and Chavonne(51).

The attack was most violent and successful in the center. The attacking divisions had each a front of only 2 kilometers. They succeeded in following closely the rolling barrage and reached the Aisne before noon(51).

The German left flank conformed to the advance of the principal attack. It crossed the Aisne-Marne Canal and progressed to the west of Cormicy in spite of the resistance of British divisions(51).

At noon the Aisne was crossed and the front was approximately Vauxillon—east of Vailly—St. Mard—Bouffignereux—Cormicy—west of Brimont(51).

During the rest of the day the advance continued. On the right flank Vailly was occupied. In the center the Germans reached the Vesle, taking Bazoches. On the night May 27-28 the Germans held the heights north of the Vesle and were preparing to cross(51). The German communiqué of May 28, which reported their line as on the heights north of the Vesle, also reported the capture of 5,000 prisoners(52).

(52) German communiqué, May 28, evening.

The German High Command decided on the exploitation of the success. This was planned to involve a penetration to the Marne, in the center of the attack, with both flanks of the attack extending the scope of the operations. The German right flank was charged with the capture of Soissons, an important railway junction, and an advance into the great woods of Villers-Cotterets. The German left flank was charged with a similar action against Reims and the wooded region south of that city. These operations involved the entry into battle of four fresh divisions on the German right flank and two on the German left flank. They also involved making ultimately available for the attack four more divisions, one of which would not be available until June 5. The attack, then, which was opened with 31 divisions, involved 41 divisions(51).

On the day and night of May 27 all the available French and British divisions in the vicinity of the Aisne front were involved in the fighting with the exception of the French 4th Division at Dormans(53).

(53) French Order of Battle Maps, Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

On May 28 the concentration of French divisions continued. Troops as far away as the 10th Colonial Division, just west of Toul, and the 154th Division, just west of Amiens, were brought into the rear areas threatened by the success of the German offensive(53).

On the night of May 27-28 the German center crossed the Vesle(51). During the day of May 28 the German attacks were violent on both flanks, and, on the German right flank, reached the outskirts of Soissons(54). In the center the Germans reached the heights south of the Vesle. The line on the night of May 28, from east to west, was marked approximately by the towns Muizon, Crugny, Bruys, Venizel, Vauxaillon(53).

(54) French communiqué, May 29, morning.

On May 29 the German center advanced from 8 to 10 kilometers. On the flanks the allied resistance was stronger and German progress was slower(55). On the

(55) A French Study of the German Offensives in 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

night of May 29 the line ran from the outskirts of Reims north of the Fère and Riz forests to the outskirts of Soissons(53).

The concentration of French reserves continued, the 93d Division being moved in from north of Amiens(53).

On May 30 the German advance continued, with the greatest success in the center. The German right flank was held in the vicinity of Soissons. The German left flank was held in the vicinity of the wooded region south of Reims, the Montagne-de-Reims. The approximate line on the evening of May 30 from east to west was, west of Ville en Tardenois-Jaulgonne and the Marne, almost to Château-Thierry, thence north to Oulchy(55).

The French concentration went on, the 167th Division coming in from the Vosges sector(53).

On May 31 the Germans increased their gains on the Marne and in the direction of Paris. That part of Château-Thierry north of the Marne was occupied and Neuilly St. Front was taken. The German flanks, however, were held west of Soissons and southwest of Reims(55).

(56) French Order of Battle Maps, Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

By this time the great German attack had begun to lose its force, and the French had practically succeeded in establishing a defensive line. On June 1 the French order of battle from west of Reims to west of Soissons was: The 5th Corps with three divisions in line, including the British 19th Division; the 1st Colonial Corps with three divisions in line; the 38th Corps with two divisions in line, including elements of the American 3d Division; the 21st Corps with two divisions in line; the 7th Corps with three divisions in line; the 11th Corps with three divisions in line; and the 1st Corps with five divisions in line. The American 2d Division was still in reserve(56). On June 1 the principal effort of the German attack was on the German right flank in an effort to penetrate the forests of Villers-Cotterets. This effort was, however, unsuccessful. On June 2 the effort of the German right from north of Soissons to Château-Thierry was continued(55). On this day there was fighting in the vicinity of Bouresches(57). The German left flank was held between Reims and Dormans(55).

(57) French communiqué, June 3, morning.

On June 1 German attacks on the front Anthenay-Ville-en-Tardenois-Vrigny and in the vicinity of Fort de la Pompelle, east of Reims, were checked with heavy

losses. Reims was almost encircled but remained in French possession, and the Montagne de Reims was also held by the French (55). On June 2 the French Order of Battle Map first showed the American 2d Division in the front line, northwest of Château-Thierry (53). On June 3 the only German advance was in the vicinity of Cutry and Dommiers, southwest of Soissons. The fighting was heavy and gains limited (55). On the night of June 3-4 the slackening German offensive may be said to have been definitely stopped (58). The German troops had suffered greatly in a deep advance over country which rendered supply difficult (55).

(58) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 33.

Further German attacks were discontinued. Despite the undeniable success of the offensive, the German High Command felt the German troops had suffered heavy losses, especially in the latter days of the offensive. The German High Command also felt that an advance further to the west was necessary to achieve any decisive results in this region. Consequently, the Montdidier-Noyon offensive was decided on (59).

(59) "My War Memories," Ludendorff, pp. 629-630.

The success of the German offensive on the Aisne was due very largely to the fact that surprise was secured. It showed the same characteristics as that of March 21. The initial attack was planned in great detail. The exploitation of success was limited by the resistance encountered. In general, attack was broken off in case of resistance and reserves were employed only in regions where the attack was successful, to exploit the success (55).

3. PARTICIPATION OF AMERICAN DIVISIONS IN THE AISNE OPERATION.

General Pershing's estimate of the situation in the Marne salient at the time of entry of American troops into the battle is interesting. In a cable to the War Department, written during the most trying moments of the operation, he gave the situation as follows:

(60) Confidential cable, A. E. F., received at War Department, June 4, 1918, H. S. files.

The arrival of the enemy's troops on the Marne and their establishment from the vicinity of Château-Thierry to Verneuil, on the night of May 29 to 30, definitely marks the end of the first phase of the Aisne offensive. The enemy had secured, by the first stroke, a tactically important objective—a defensive flank on the Marne—and possessing a strategically important objective, the control of our main line of lateral communication with Verdun. Thus, in about three and one-half days from the time of the original attack, the reason for directing the axis of the attack straight south ceased to exist.

Since the night of May 29 to 30 the direction of the attack has changed pronouncedly to the southwest. To this must be added the operations to the northwest of Soissons which began on the night of May 30 to 31, the general direction of which is also southwest. It seems clearly established that so long as the enemy is allowed to retain the initiative his future operations will be directed on Paris. The situation in the salient Noyon to Reims is important.

The keys to the transportation systems of the salient are the rail and road centers, Soissons and Reims. Without these the enemy will be confronted with difficult transportation problems, involving the use of motor trucks on the 16 roads, for the most part cross-country roads, now available to him. The possession of Soissons has proved an enormous relief to the enemy, since, by means of it, from Rethel and Laon, he can reach every sector of his new lines. Nevertheless, the enemy's transportation situation can not be satisfactorily adjusted until he has taken Reims; hence the recent heavy attack on this important center(60).

(61) "My War Memories," Ludendorff, pp. 630-632.

This estimate of the situation coincides with that of Ludendorff, as expressed after the war(61).

It was on the road to Paris that American units first met the German advance.

The 3d Division¹ entered first into line in the Aisne operation and its participation will consequently be given first (62).

On May 27 the 3d Division, less its artillery brigade and engineer regiment, was in the Chateauvillain training area not far from American General Headquarters at Chaumont. The division had practically completed the first period of its training and was ready for entry into line, although it had not yet been joined by its field artillery brigade. On May 28 the commanding general of the division had left the training area for the sector occupied by the 26th Division north of Toul, preliminary to a relief of the 26th by the 3d Division. He was recalled to his division the same day (64).

On May 30, 1918, the chief of staff, A. E. F., confirmed in writing orders placing the 3d Division, less elements not in the training area, at the disposition of the general commanding the French Group of Armies of the North. In the same document it was noted that the division would probably be used to hold the passages of the Marne between Epernay and Château-Thierry. It was also noted that the French Army would furnish transportation on May 30 or 31 (65).

On the same date the French Group of Armies of the North assigned the division to the French Sixth Army, which in turn assigned it to the French 38th Corps (66).

The first action of the division was to send the 7th Machine Gun Battalion (the motorized divisional battalion) to Condé-en-Brie, just south of the Marne, to report to the French Group of Armies of the North (67).

This battalion left the training area with its own transportation on the afternoon of May 30. It was immediately directed into line, and on the afternoon of May 31 occupied positions in that part of Château-Thierry south of the Marne. Its positions were bombarded during the night of May 31-June 1, but the battalion remained in position, and in conjunction with French troops repulsed the German attempt to cross the Marne on the morning of June 1. This attack was the high-water mark of the German advance in this immediate vicinity (66).

¹ Organization of the 3d Division: 5th Infantry Brigade—4th Infantry, 7th Infantry, 8th Machine Gun Battalion; 6th Infantry Brigade—30th Infantry, 38th Infantry, 9th Machine Gun Battalion; 3d Field Artillery Brigade—10th Field Artillery, 76th Field Artillery, 18th Field Artillery (heavy), 3d Trench Mortar Battery; 7th Machine Gun Battalion; 6th Engineers; 5th Field Signal Battalion; 3d Division trains and military police (63).

(62) Final Report of C. in C., p. 53.

(63) Report No. 50, Oct. 30, 1918, Divisional Index files, G-1, A. E. F.

(64) Special report, field orders, and instructions, 3d Division, May 27, July 13, 1918, G-3, files, A. E. F.

(65) Letter chief of staff to commanding general, 3d Division, May 30, 1918, General Correspondence files G-3, A. E. F.

(66) Report of operations, June 23, 3d Division, May 30, June 20, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

(67) Field Order No. 1, 3d Division, May 30, 1918, G-3 file, A. E. F.

(68) F. O. 2, 3d Div., May 30, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F. F. O. 2, 3d Division, May 30, 1918, covered the movement of the remainder of the division to the Château-Thierry region. It prescribed entrainment of the infantry brigades and designated ultimate concentration points (68).

Beginning the night of May 30-31 the 5th and 6th Infantry Brigades entrained for the Château-Thierry region, transportation being handled by French authorities (66). The Division P. C. closed at Chateauvillain at 8 p. m., May 31 (64).

On June 1 these brigades began to arrive in the vicinity of Montmirail, and move by successively arriving battalions up into sectors south of the Marne held by the French 10th and 20th Divisions (66).

Railway communications back of the threatened front were very naturally not functioning perfectly. Great delay was caused in assembling the division, and even units of the division, by changes in the detraining points made by French authorities. The Division P. C. which F. O. 2, 3d Division, had ordered established at Condé-en-Brie at 8 p. m., May 31, was established instead at Viels-Maisons (64).

(69) F. O. 3, 3d Div., June 1, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F. F. O. 3, 3d Division, June 1, 1918, prescribed the use of the division on arrival in the Château-Thierry region. The 5th Brigade, less the 4th Infantry, passed to the command of the French 20th Division on the right. Brigade P. C. was at Condé-en-Brie. The 6th Brigade, less the 30th Infantry, passed to the command of the French 10th Division on the left. Brigade P. C. was at Courboin. Division headquarters at Viels-Maisons held in reserve the 4th Infantry and the 30th Infantry. This divisional reserve formed a part of the reserve of the French 38th Corps (69).

Only a few units of the division were immediately employed in combat. On June 1 the 3d Battalion, 7th Infantry, together with units of the 8th Machine Gun Battalion went into line south of the Marne in the vicinity of Courthiezy, near Dormans, where it remained six days. On the same date one company of the 9th Machine Gun Battalion went into position in Château-Thierry (66). On June 2 the 2d Battalion of the 30th Infantry was attached to the French 4th Cavalry Division and moved to Saulchery, on the Marne (64). It participated with French troops in the fighting in the vicin-

(69a) Questionnaire of Apr. 6, 1920, No. 127, H. S. files.

ity of Hill 204, north of Bonneil (69a). On June 4 the 7th Machine Gun Battalion returned to the division from Château-Thierry (64). If the German attack be considered to have been halted by June 4, the participation of the 3d Division has been covered.

On May 30, 1918, the 2d Division² was in the vicinity of Gisors, northwest of Paris, preparing for entry into an active sector (70).

(70) Report of the 2d Division on the fighting northwest of Château-Thierry, G-5 files, A. E. F.

It was to relieve the 1st Division in a sector west of Montdidier. It had already sent out billeting parties and issued orders for the march north when, at 5 p. m., orders were received putting it at the disposition of the commanding general, Group of Armies of the North, and ordering its movement to the vicinity of Meaux. The infantry was to be moved in French trucks, the rest of the division by rail. The movement of the infantry units began at 5 a. m., May 31; that of the other units at 5.30. The field artillery brigade moved by railroad, but, on account of lack of transportation, the infantry and machine-gun trains made the trip by marching. The 3d Infantry Brigade and the 4th Marine Brigade arrived in the vicinity of May-en-Multien on the afternoon of May 31. The last infantry unit arrived at 11 p. m. (70).

At 7.40 p. m., May 31, F. O. 5, 2d Division, had issued. It recorded passage of the division from command of the French 7th Corps into reserve of the French 21st Corps, designated Montreuil-aux-Lions as Division P. C., and indicated concentration points for the units of the division in the vicinity of Montreuil-aux-Lions (72).

(72) F. O. 3, 2d Div., May 31, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

It was evident, however, that the French defense was in a fluid state, incident to the formation of a new line. Upon leaving the trucks the division had been directed by the French command to move into position between Gandelu and Montigny-L'Allier, northeast of Meaux. At 8 p. m. orders were received while the division was en route designating the position between Neufchelles and Roucrois, with headquarters at May-en-Multien, for occupancy by the division. Just after midnight, May 31-June 1, new orders were received from the French

² Organization of the 2d Division: 3d Infantry Brigade—9th Infantry, 23d Infantry, 5th Machine Gun Battalion; 4th Marine Brigade—5th Marines, 6th Marines, 6th Machine Gun Battalion; 2d Field Artillery Brigade—12th Field Artillery, 15th Field Artillery, 17th Field Artillery (heavy), 2d Trench Mortar Battery; 4th Machine Gun Battalion; 2d Engineers; 1st Field Signal Battalion; 2d Division trains and military police (71).

(71) Report No. 50, Oct. 30, 1918, Division Index, G-1 files; A. E. F.

command directing an emergency concentration of the division in the area about Montreuil. This placed the division on the Château-Thierry-Paris road, along which the German advance was continuing (70).

By a forced march the troops arrived just after day-break, passing a stream of refugees and French troops. The 9th Infantry went into position south of the Château-Thierry-Paris road at le Thiolet. The 6th Marines went into position with two battalions in line and one in support north of the Château-Thierry road from le Thiolet through the Clerembauts wood to Triangle. They were supported by the 6th Machine Gun Battalion. These positions were taken in support of scattered French troops. The remainder of the division was held in reserve. During the day the troops had occupied their positions and scattered French units passed through them from 7 p. m. (70).

(73) F. O. 6, 2d Div., June 1, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F. At 6 p. m., June 1, F. O. 6, 2d Division, was issued, prescribing and confirming the dispositions which have already been seen to have been taken. Headquarters of the French 21st Corps were at Champigny. A front marked by Essomes-Monneaux-Bouresches and extending toward Belleau was held by French troops. The support line occupied by the 2d Division was described as Bonneil-le Thiolet-the Château of Belleau (73). The line, however, actually ran between Lucy-le-Bocage and Belleau Wood, and was consequently well to the west of both the Château and town of Belleau (73a). The 3d Brigade held from Bonneil to le Thiolet, both inclusive, the 4th Brigade extending to the northwest. Division reserves were the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines; 2d Battalion, 23d Infantry; 4th Machine Gun Battalion; and 2d Engineers. Concentration of the 2d Field Artillery Brigade was ordered in the vicinity of Cocherel (73).

(74) 2d F. A. Brig., Dec. 19, 1918 (Spec. Report, 2d Div., May 31, July 9, 1918), G-3 files, A. E. F. By midnight June 1 this brigade had been detrained in the vicinity of Crepy, and by the night of June 2 had concentrated in the vicinity of Cocherel (74). At midnight June 1-2 the commanding general, French 21st Corps, notified the division that a gap of nearly 4 kilometers existed in the vicinity of Gandelu and that a German attack could be expected at any time. To fill this gap, early in the morning of June 2 the 23d Infantry, the 1st Battalion of the 5th Marines, the 5th Machine Gun Battalion, and one company of

(73a) Statement of Col. Preston Brown, chief of staff, 2d Div., July 15, 1920.

(74) Report of the 2d Division on the fighting northwest of Château-Thierry, G-3 files, A. E. F.

the 2d Engineers went into line in the vicinity of the Bois de Veuilly and Prémont. These troops were in position soon after daylight and passed under command of the French 45th Division. In the evening the 2d Battalion of the 5th Marines went into line from the Bois de Veuilly to a point $2\frac{1}{2}$ kilometers northwest of Champillon. These troops met and assisted in defeating a continuation of the German attack on this day(75).

By midnight of June 2 elements of the 2d Division held a practically continuous line marked by Bonneil, le Thiolet, Champillon, Bois de Veuilly, Prémont, Brumetz, although French units were holding isolated parts of this line(75).

At 8 p. m., June 3, F. O. 7, 2d Division, was issued. It showed the division, less the 23d Infantry, two companies 5th Machine Gun Battalion, and one company 2d Engineers, holding a position from halfway between Bonneil and le Thiolet east of le Thiolet and the woods north of that town, east of Lucy-le-Bocage, and along the northeastern and northern edge of the Bois de Veuilly, between Marigny and Veuilly. The excepted elements remained under command of the French 43d Division on the immediate left. Both infantry brigades were in line, the 3d Brigade, on the right, extending to include le Thiolet(76).

(76) F. O. 7, 2d
Div., June 3,
1918, G-3 files,
A. E. F.

The 2d Division had up to this time been supported only by French artillery, but on the night of June 3 the 2d Field Artillery Brigade moved into position in the vicinity of la Voie du Chatel-Coupru and began to deliver a heavy harassing fire(74).

Throughout the day of June 3 the division had entrenched and consolidated its position under shell fire. On the night of June 3 all French troops in advance of the position passed through it to the rear, and the division as a unit held the front line. Command passed to the commanding general, 2d Division, at 8 a. m., June 4, and included elements of dismounted French cavalry on the extreme right of the divisional sector(75).

If the German offensive be considered to have been definitely stopped by June 4, the participation of the 2d Division has been covered. Its conduct in meeting the German attack on the main road to Paris excited the most favorable comment. On June 3, 1918, the commanding general, French 21st Army Corps, under which the division was operating, wrote to the commanding

(77) Letter
French 21st
Corps, June 3,
1918, general
correspondence,
2d Division, G-3
files, A. E. F.

general of the French Sixth Army, under which the 21st Corps was operating, that the unexpected arrival and conduct under fire of the 2d Division had created a favorable impression; that arriving after a hard night's march on a heavily shelled front, it had advanced without stopping (77).

By the time that the 2d Division entered into combat in the Aisne operation the German flood that had swept over the Chemin-des-Dames on May 27 had dwindled to a stream that was moving only southwest toward Paris. Notwithstanding the fact that it had been contained by French forces on both flanks and that in the Château-Thierry region it had naturally lost its original force, it was still moving when the 2d Division deployed across the Paris road and brought it to a complete halt.

The entrance of a fresh American division into a decisive battle at such a vital point was dramatic. It naturally drew to the division more attention than was given to many gallant French and English divisions that had fought through the heat of the battle.

The incident of the 2d Division's participation was very beneficial to allied morale as exhibiting the value of American divisions. General Bliss, American Member Supreme War Council, wrote General Pershing on July 1, 1918, that he had heard frequent remarks from French officers of all ranks, French civilians, and British colleagues, expressing the belief that the American troops in the vicinity of Château-Thierry stopped the German drive and possibly saved Paris (78).

(78) 1st ind., July 1, 1918, on report of Col. Briant H. Wells to General Bliss, general correspondence, 2d Division, G-3, A. E. F. files.

4. THE MONTDIDIER-NOYON OPERATION.

On June 9, 1918, the Germans attacked the front from Montdidier to Noyon (79).

(79) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 34.

The only material change from that existing on May 27 in the general situation at the beginning of the Montdidier-Noyon operation was the successful development for the Germans of the Aisne operation. The German Army still possessed an available mass for maneuver. On June 9 there were 212 divisions in the German armies on the western front, of which 151 were identified as being in line (80). On the same date there were 208 allied divisions on the western front, of which 125 were in line. The total number of allied divisions included 18 American divisions, which have been seen to have approximated double the strength of divisions of other armies. Eleven of these American divisions were not in line. It can thus be seen that much of the available allied reserve consisted of newly arrived American divisions (80, 81). The French and British reserves were scattered in normal defensive formation back of the fronts held by the respective armies (80). The principal concentration of American divisions was still in northern France back of the British area, and the number of divisions there had been increased to ten. The secondary concentration of American reserve divisions in the Lorraine training areas had disappeared, these divisions being utilized in the Aisne operation or on other parts of the French front (80, 81). Before the Montdidier-Noyon attack started, steps had been taken to move some of the divisions in reserve in rear of the British down into support positions on the threatened French front (80, 81). General Pershing consulted with Field Marshal Haig on this matter on June 3, and five American divisions were released from the British area for this purpose (82). This movement had not, however, been started on June 9 (81).

(80) French Order of Battle Maps, Map Room files, C-3, A. E. F.

(81) Map showing participation of American Divs., Map Room files, C-3, A. E. F.

(82) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 33.

The Montdidier-Noyon operation was undertaken as a continuation of the Aisne operation. It was designed to complete the outflanking and subsequent capture of the forests of Compiègne and Villers-Cotterets which lay between the Oise and the Marne Rivers. A successful operation involving the capture of these woods would establish a new front directly threatening Paris(82).

(83) "My War
Memories," Lu-
dendorff, p. 639.

The decisive stroke which the German command must deliver before the arrival in overwhelming force of American troops could then be directed either southward into the heart of France or westward to the channel to separate the British and French Armies(83). The great

(84) Report of
C. in C., A. E.
F., cabled Nov.
20, 1918, p. 10.

June-July movement of American troops from the States was well under way and the contemplated arrival of these troops, incompletely trained as they were, warranted the use of all the older divisions in the confidence

(85) German
communiqué,
June 11, evening.

that reserves were not lacking(84). However, the actual arrival of fresh American divisions had been almost offset by allied losses in the May 27 operation, where the Germans claimed to have captured 65,000 prisoners(85).

(86) Relief map,
Montdidier - No-
yon front. Map
Room, War Col-
lege.

The terrain over which the German attack was made was neither particularly favorable nor unfavorable to the attacking force. The eastern half of the ground attacked consisted of a massif of wooded, cut-up hills southwest of Noyon, and was very difficult ground. There were, however, wooded areas back of this front sufficient for the concealment of concentrations. The western half of the front attacked southeast of Montdidier was favorable ground for an attack. It was quite open rolling country. The two natural gateways to Paris from the northeast and east are the Marne and the Oise valleys. The operation of May 27 had given the Germans a flank on the Marne and they were already astride the Oise. If the Montdidier-Noyon operation was successful enough to result in the capture of the great woods between the Marne and the Oise, the Oise gateway to Paris was open to the German Army. The terrain was favorable to communication and supply. A main road leading to Paris ran directly through the center of the front of attack, while on the left flank of the German attack roads and railroads in the Oise valley were favorable to the communication and supply of an attacking force. Compiègne was an important road and railroad junction(86).

The German plans for the Montdidier-Noyon operation included an attack by the Eighteenth Army on the front between Montdidier and Noyon with Compiègne as the first objective. This attack was to be seconded by an attack of the Seventh Army in the vicinity of Soissons from the western face of the Marne salient(87).

(87) "My War Memories," Ludendorff, pp. 616, 633, 634.

The German Eighteenth Army (von Hutier) included the Montdidier-Noyon front. Prior to June 9 there were eight divisions in line on this front. Immediately in rear of this front there was considerable concentration of rested German divisions within easy marching distance. This naturally indicated the probability of an attack on this front. Opposing the German Eighteenth Army was the French Third Army. It held the front from east of the Carlepont Woods northeast of Compiègne to east of Montdidier. It had in line from east to west the 12th Corps with two divisions, east of the Oise; the 2d Corps with two divisions; the 34th Corps with two divisions; and the 35th Corps with three divisions. On the left of this army was the French 10th Corps, part of the French First Army. This corps held the front immediately south and west of Montdidier with the French 60th Division and the American 1st Division in line. Immediately in rear of the French front lines were five French divisions in reserve. There were also six more divisions in reserve in the rear areas back of the front held by the French Third Army(88).

(88) French Order of Battle Maps, Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

Definite information as to the impending attack, including the exact date, was obtained by the French superior headquarters and communicated to the command prior to June 9(89), and the command was prepared to meet it(90).

(89) Appendix to Report of Operations, French 36th Division, June 21, 1918.

(90) Report of Operations French 36th Division, June 20, 1918, files Capt. H. L. Hodges, Cav.

The battle was opened by an intense German artillery preparation, which began at midnight June 8-9 and covered the whole front from west of Montdidier to east of the Oise. There was an extensive use of gas, both chlorine and mustard. There was neutralization fire on batteries with phosgene and mustard gas. Along the roads shrapnel was used and the front positions were shelled with gas and high explosives (91, 92). The French artillery counterpreparation was immediately increased(92).

(91) Report of 1st Div., June 8 to 9, confidential cable received by W. D., June 13, 1918, H. S. files.

(92) French communiqué, June 9, morning.

On the left of the threatened French front calls for barrage were made as early as 3.25 a. m., June 9, and

at 3.45 a. m. the German infantry advanced(90). The hour of the general German infantry attack on the whole front from Montdidier to Noyon was given in the French communiqué of that day as about 4.30 a. m.(92).

Twelve divisions attacked in the first line on this front. Seven of them, including the two flanking divisions, were divisions which had already been identified in sector. Five were inserted, including the attack units composed of the German 4th Guards Division, Jaeger Division, and 3d Bavarian Division(88). In spite of the fact that the attack was expected and the French counter-offensive preparation violent, the attack was partially successful(93, 94). The greatest penetration was some 7 kilometers in the center. On the evening of June 9 the line from right to left was approximately Caneau-Bessons-sur-Matz-Le Frétoy-Rubescourt(95).

On June 10 the German attack continued. Two fresh German divisions were engaged and two additional French divisions. German penetration continued for some four kilometers on a narrow front in the center. The French lines on both wings of the attack held. The French 60th Division held in the western part of its sector. The American 1st Division, immediately on the left, maintained its lines(88). On the evening of June 10 the front from right to left was: South of the Thiescourt Woods-Marquéglise-Méry(96). The German attacking troops had suffered great losses(97). The German command reported 8,000 prisoners taken(98).

On June 11 the Germans had reached the Aronde, but on this day the French met the attack with counter-attack(99).

One counterattack was delivered by the hastily formed Groupement Mangin, which was only officially called into being at midnight June 10. It consisted of the 35th Corps Headquarters, five infantry divisions, two motorized artillery regiments, one brigade of British autocannon, and 12 battalions of tanks (100).

An 8-kilometer front was attacked, from north of Courcelles-Epayelles to south of Wacquemoulin, on the western face of the small salient created by the German attack of June 9, 10, and 11. The country was open and favorable for attack. Four divisions were in the first line; they were, from north to south, the 129th, the 152d, the 165th, and the 48th. The 133d Division was in reserve. Liaison with the attack was insured on the south

(93) "My War Memories," Luedendorff, p. 634.

(94) Report 1st Div., June 5-6, confidential communiqué, received W. D., June 11, 1918.

(95) French communiqué, June 9, evening.

(96) French communiqué, June 10, evening.

(97) American communiqué, June 10.

(98) German communiqué, June 10, evening.

(99) French communiqué, June 11, morning.

(100) Ordre General No. 1, Groupement Mangin, June 10, 1918, H. S. files.

(101) No. 1/171, 3, 10th C. A., June 11, 1918, H. S. files.

by the 11th Division, already in sector. On the north the attack was covered by an advance of the 36th Division, already in sector. The 169th Division, the left division of the Third Army, did not participate except to take advantage of the attack to regain lost ground; but the artillery preparation extended along the whole front of the right corps of the First Army, west of Montdidier(100), (101).

The artillery preparation on the front attacked began at 10.30 a. m., June 11. The infantry attacked at 11 a. m., less than 12 hours after the attacking unit had been formed(100).

This counterattack was successful. It reestablished the line at approximately Vandelicourt-Marquéglise-St. Maur-south of Belloy(99, 102).

For the first time a German 1918 offensive was held at the height of its success. For this reason some authorities look on June 11, the date of the counterattack, as the turning point of the war(103).

The French, however, evacuated the salient east of the Oise formed by the success of the May 27 and the June 9 German offensives. This evacuation involved the loss of the Carlepont woods. The new line was established to the south and west of Ribecourt(99).

On June 12 fighting on the Montdidier-Noyon front continued. On the same day the German Seventh Army carried out the secondary attack from the western front of the Marne salient. The fighting extended from just south of the Aisne to just north of the Villers-Cotterets woods(104). Five divisions made the attack, two of which were freshly inserted in line for that purpose. The immediate objective was the Vic-Coeuvres road, the taking of which would drive a wedge between the Villers-Cotterets and Compiègne forests. The attack was preceded by heavy artillery preparation from 8 to 11 p. m., June 11, and from 2.30 to 4.30 a. m., June 12, when the infantry attacked. The French artillery counterpreparation and infantry resistance caused heavy German losses(105). By noon of June 12 there was heavy fighting on the line Dommiers-Cutry(104). By nightfall the German attack had taken Coeuvres, on the main road leading from Vic into the Villers-Cotterets forest(106).

On the morning of June 13, however, the progress of the attack was checked on the line Coeuvres-Laversine,

(102) French Order of Battle Map, Map Room Files, G-3, A. E. F.

(103) The London Times History of the War, vol. 20, pp. 336-337.

(104) French communiqué, June 12, morning.

(105) Summary of information, G. H. Q., A. E. F., June 13, 1918, French G. H. Q., bulletin of June 13, 1918.

(106) French communiqué, June 13, morning.

(107) French communiqué, June 13, evening.

and the attack was not renewed(107). The attack had failed to get through sufficiently to insure the success of the main attack on the Montdidier-Noyon front(108). By nightfall of June 13 the line had practically stabilized from Montdidier to the Villers-Cotterets forest, and on June 15 the movement northward had commenced of French reserve divisions immediately back of the Montdidier-Noyon front(109).

(108) "My War Memories," Luedendorff, p. 663-664.
(109) French Order of Battle Maps, Map Room files, G-3, A. E. F.

In view of the success of the French counterattack of June 11, which gained ground, particularly in the vicinity of Méry, and in view of the evident accumulation of French reserves, German General Headquarters ordered the battle broken off on June 11. This decision was confirmed by the failure of the German Seventh Army attack southwest of Soissons(108).

(110) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 34.

The German offensive between Montdidier and Noyon was a strategic failure(110). It had not altered the strategic situation brought about by the May 27 attack of the German Seventh Army(108).

(111) "Out of My Life," von Hindenburg, pp. 364-365.

By the middle of June, despite the ground and booty gained in its 1918 offensives and the allied losses incident thereto, the general military situation had materially changed for the worse for Germany. The appearance of American troops on the battlefield had fulfilled allied hopes and disinclined the Allies to compromise. The offensives had made in the German Army great gaps that could not be filled; but German General Headquarters saw hopes only in a military victory, and felt that it must remain on the offensive(111).

5. PARTICIPATION OF AMERICAN DIVISIONS FROM THE COMPLETION OF THE AISNE OPERATION TO THE ASSEMBLY FOR THE AISNE-MARNE OPERATION.

The history of the American active participation during the period June 4–July 14, 1918, is naturally that of the divisions in line during this period. From the halting of the Aisne offensive, which has been taken as having occurred on the night of June 3–4, the 2d Division was most actively engaged (112).

(112) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 33.

On June 4 this division has been seen in a divisional front-line sector astride the Château-Thierry–Paris road. In the morning of this day all supporting French artillery was withdrawn, with the exception of one regiment of French 75's, which was attached to the 2d Field Artillery Brigade. The artillery fired on enemy columns entering Courchamps and Bussiares (113).

(113) Report of the 2d Division on the fighting northwest of Château-Thierry, from end of May to early part of July, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

On the night of June 4–5 the 23d Infantry and attached units, which had been detached under French command farther north, rejoined the division (113).

F. O. 8, 2d Division, issued at 10 a. m., June 5, gave the occupation of the sector. The division was flanked by the French 4th Cavalry Division on the right and the French 167th Division on the left. It held the line southeast corner of the Bois de la Marette–Bois de Clerembauts–Lucy de Bocage–wood northwest of Lucy—800 meters north of Champillon. The battle order from right to left was: The 3d Brigade with the 9th Infantry and the 23d Infantry; the 4th Brigade with the 6th Marines and the 5th Marines. Triangle, which belonged to the 3d Brigade, was the internal brigade boundary. Each brigade had one battalion of the 2d Engineers for reserve. One battalion 23d Infantry was division reserve, and one battalion 6th Marines, corps reserve. The 2d Field Artillery Brigade with attached French units gave artillery support. A French aviation squadron served the division (114).

(114) F. O. 8, 2d Div., June 5, 1918, G-3 files, A. E. F.

On this day a number of local attacks were repulsed by the 4th Brigade without great losses(113).

From June 5 to June 30 no formal field order for attack was issued. Nevertheless the division was constantly engaged in local offensives(112).

At 3.45 a. m., June 6, one battalion of the 5th Marines made a successful attack with the French 167th Division in the direction of Torcy. At 5 p. m. the 4th Marine Brigade attacked on the line Bouresches-Torcy. Bouresches was taken, but the attack was checked in the Bois de Belleau. The 3d Brigade also advanced its line on this date. On June 7 a German counterattack on Bouresches was repulsed(113).

On June 8, at 1 a. m., both regiments of the 3d Brigade were attacked. At 1.30 a. m. Bouresches was attacked. At 4.30 a. m. the 4th Brigade attacked in the Bois de Belleau. This push was continued on June 9(113).

At 4.30 a. m. on June 10 the 4th Brigade attacked with some success in the Bois de Belleau. On June 11, at 4.30 a. m., the 5th Marines attacked in the Bois de Belleau, after heavy artillery preparation(113).

The attacks of previous days had been without proper artillery support, owing to a lack of coordination between infantry and artillery, and had cost heavy losses. The attack of June 11, however, was well executed and successful(115). The Bois de Belleau was practically cleared, and some 400 prisoners, 35 machine guns, and 14 trench mortars were taken. At the same time Bouresches was unsuccessfully attacked by the Germans, who suffered heavy losses(113).

The German pressure, however, did not relax. They infiltrated persistently into gaps. On June 13 there was bitter fighting on the front of the 4th Brigade. The Germans made attacks on this front, while in the afternoon the 5th Marines continued the cleaning out of Belleau Woods(113).

The character of the fighting is evident from the following statement of a company commander in the 5th Marines(116) :

In the attack of June 11 our left flank had been left wide open and the Germans walked in, took up a good position, and attacked us in our rear. We faced our supports about and beat them off. On the morning of the 13th we were told that we would

(115) Letter, 2d F. A. Brigade, Dec. 19, 1918 (Spec. Report, 2d Div., May 31-July 9, 1918), G-3 files, A. E. F.

(116) Questionnaire of Apr. 6, 1920, No. 45, H. S. files.

have to drive them out. * * * On the 12th I had received 60 replacements who had never heard a shot before.

* * * * *

The Germans fought their machine guns with desperation and courage and mostly died at their guns. They did not hesitate to close with the bayonet and both sides threw grenades that killed both enemy and friend. There were absolutely no prisoners taken during the heat of the attack and anything on the ground received a bayonet thrust to make sure of death. When the 55th and 43d companies pushed the enemy's third line down into a ravine and were fighting hand to hand, two German machine guns on the far slope opened up on the line, killing as many Germans as marines, if not more.

On June 14 there were upward of 700 evacuations from a German Yperite bombardment(113).

On June 15 the 7th Infantry, 3d Division, was placed at the disposal of the 2d Division for relief purposes. The next few days were devoted to reliefs, but on June 20 there were fresh American pushes at various points along the front(113).

On June 21 and June 22 the 7th Infantry, attached to the 4th Brigade, made small advances with varying success, and was relieved (113).

On June 23 the 5th Marines attacked the north tip of the Bois de Belleau, still held by the Germans. The attack was unsuccessful and the commanding officer of the attacking battalion reported that infantry alone could not dislodge the enemy. Consequently, on June 25 there was very heavy artillery preparation. Following the preparation, the 3d Battalion, 5th Marines, cleared the woods of Germans(113).

The front of the 4th Brigade having been secured by clearing the Bois de Belleau, F. O. 9, 2d Division, was issued on June 30 for an attack by the 3d Brigade on Vaux and the Bois de la Roche. The attack was planned in conjunction with the French 39th Division on the right, but the French division did not push the attack. One battalion each of the 9th and 23d Infantry constituted the attacking forces. Each battalion was assisted by one company of the 2d Engineers and by machine-gun units of the division(117).

(117)F. O. 9,
2d Div., June 30,
1918, G-3 files,
A. E. F.

Following a 12-hour artillery preparation which was completely successful, the infantry attack was launched at 6 p. m., July 1. The 9th Infantry was on its objective at 6.40 p. m., the 23d Infantry at 7.30 p. m. The new line was consolidated, and withstood a heavy bombard-

(118)Letter 3d
Infantry Brig.,
July 2, 1918
(Spec. Report, 2d
Div., May 21-
July 9, 1918),
G-3 files, A. E. F.

ment of gas and high explosive during the night of July 1-2. At about 4 a. m. a counterattack, following a rolling barrage, was made on the right wing. It was broken by small-arms fire and over 100 prisoners taken. The total captures were over 600 prisoners and a quantity of machine guns and munitions. Immediate losses were less than 200 (118).

(118a) Skeleton
History of Divi-
sions, G-3 files,
A. E. F.

On July 7 the 26th Division commenced the relief of the 2d Division, which was completed on July 9 (113). While in this sector the 2d Division had suffered 9,777 casualties. It had captured 1,678 prisoners, 12 trench mortars, and 119 machine guns (118a).

(119) Field Or-
der No. 4, 3d
Div., June 6,
1918, G-3 files,
A. E. F.

During the period just covered the 3d Division was continually in sector south of the Marne in the Château-Thierry region. Although badly scattered, it was organized for defense with the mission of stopping any German attempt to cross the Marne on its front. Its post of command was at Grandes Bordeaux Farm (119).

On June 11 the post of command was moved to Château la Doultre. The division was still scattered, but the division commander was in command of a front of some 8 kilometers on the Marne from Mézy to Chierry (119).

(120) Special
Report, 3d Div.,
May 27 to July
13, 1918, files A.
E. F.

On June 13 the 5th Brigade, including the 4th and 7th Infantry, was shifted from the right to the left of the sector of the French 38th Corps, under which the 3d Division was operating. The brigade passed to the command of the French 10th Colonial Division. Subsequently, the 7th Infantry passed to the command of the 2d Division. This transfer was completed on June 18 (120).

(121) Letter C.
G., 3d Div., June
14, 1918, General
Correspondence
file, G-3, A. E. F.

On June 14 the division commander suggested an assembly of the division to the commander in chief, American Expeditionary Forces (121).

On June 17 the chief of staff, American Expeditionary Forces, answered that the present distribution was necessary and that the commander in chief had the assembly of the division in mind (122).

(122) Letter C.
of S., A. E. F.,
to C. G., 3d
Div., June 17
and 18, General
Correspondence
files, G-3, A. E.
F.

The assembly of the division was gradually completed. On the night of June 20-21 it had all of its infantry ex-

(123) Maps 3d
Div., Map Room
files, G-3, A. E. F.
(123a) State-
ment Col. R. H.
C. Kelton, C. of
S., 3d Div., July
15, 1920.

cept the 7th Infantry. Each regiment with the division had one battalion in the front line (123). By June 27 the division was assembled in line with the battle order from right to left: 38th, 30th, 7th, and 4th Infantry Regiments (123, 123a).

Meanwhile, the 1st Division had remained in the active Cantigny sector. Following the Cantigny operation, already described, the division was organized for defense with all troops in fighting positions from June 6 to 9, inclusive, in preparation for the Montdidier-Noyon operation. The division sustained heavy artillery fire on the first day of this operation, but maintained its positions. It did not have to meet the infantry attack, although the division on its right was forced to modify its lines. Following this attack there was continual raiding. The most important raid was that of June 29, in which 33 prisoners were taken by the Americans. The division was relieved by the French 152d and French 166th Divisions, the command passing on July 7, 1918. Following relief, the division moved by truck and marching to the vicinity of the Marne salient (124).

The 26th Division, which remained in the sector north of Toul during most of this period, was relieved from sector June 28, and moved into the vicinity of the Marne salient, relieving the 2d Division, as already noted (125).

The 42d Division was relieved from the Baccarat sector in Lorraine on June 21, 1918, by the 77th Division and moved toward the Château-Thierry front. It was held, however, at Châlons and diverted into a support position on the Champagne front, where it served from July 4 to 14 with the French 21st Corps in the French Fourth Army (126, 126a).

No American corps were engaged in active operations prior to the Aisne-Marne operation.

The first two corps organized were the 1st Corps and the 2d Corps. The 1st Corps was organized June 15, 1918, with headquarters at Neufchateau, not far from General Headquarters at Chaumont. On June 21 the corps was ordered to La Ferté sous Jouarre, on the Marne front, for administrative command of various American divisions grouped on that front (127).

The 2d Corps, whose organization was begun March 19, 1918 (128), was created for the command of the 10 divisions which were brought into reserve positions back of the British front in April, May, and early June (129).

The period from June 4 to July 18, 1918, was the most crucial period of the war. Some authorities give June 11, 1918, the date of the French counterattack in the Montdidier-Noyon operation, as the turning point (130). General Pershing gives July 18 as the turning point (131).

(124) Battles, etc., 1st Div., H. S. 193-35.

(125) History 26th Div., H. S. 226.

(126) Historical Report, 42d Div., Feb. 6, 1919, H. S. 193-35.

(126a) Memo. A. C. of S., G-3, G. H. Q., July 2, 1918, general correspondence file, 42d Div., G-3, A. E. F.

(127) Summary History, 1st American Army Corps, H. S. 181-6.

(128) G. O. 1, 2d Corps, H. S. 19, 1918. Journal of Operations, 2d Corps, H. S. files.

(129) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 33.

(130) London Times History of the War, vol. 29, pp. 336-337.

(131) Final Report, C. in C., A. E. F., p. 36.

(132) Cable
from Pershing
No. 1369, June
25, 1918, Cable
History Military
Program, H. S.
files.

The dominating element in the general military situation during this period was not the active participation of scattered American divisions, but the potential strength of green American divisions arriving and passing into reserve(132).

(133) "My War
Memories," Lu-
dendorff, pp. 609.
630, 637.

Nowhere was this fact more quickly realized than in the German High Command. While Ludendorff had found American troops so far encountered generally green, he acknowledged their bravery and unshaken nerve. He recognized the extreme importance of the fact that even the most newly arrived American divisions were available for the relief of more experienced troops in quiet sectors, and that by this fact American participation had become the decisive factor in the war. By the middle of June he found that the arrival of American divisions had wiped out the German numerical advantage on the western front and was fearful of the effect of these fresh troops on German morale(133).

Of the combat divisions the 1st, 2d, 26th, 42d, 32d, 93d, 3d, 77th, 5th, 82d, 35th, 28th, 4th, 30th, 27th, and 80th have been seen to have arrived in France by May 31, 1918. The dates of arrival of other combat divisions which arrived during the crucial period are given below. In order to secure uniformity, the date given is that of arrival of division headquarters at a French or British port. A period of a week or so, therefore, should be allowed for before the division can be considered as a reserve unit assembled in France and available in case of emergency.

(134) Dates of
arrival of divi-
sions, H. S. files.

Dates of arrival were as follows: 78th Division, June 5; 89th Division, June 16; 92d Division, June 19; 37th Division, June 22; 29th Division, June 27; 90th Division, July 7; 79th Division, July 15; and 91st Division, July 17, 1918(134).

(135) Map show-
ing operations of
American divi-
sions on the west-
ern front, Map
Room files G-3,
A. E. F.

As it became increasingly evident that the German effort to achieve victory on the western front would be directed southward into France in place of westward to the Channel, American divisions were moved southward from the British area into reserve positions back of the threatened front. It has already been noted that on June 3, following a consultation of General Pershing with Field Marshal Haig, five American divisions were released from the British rear to be moved south. The movement of these divisions was not, however, actually

begun until the Montdidier-Noyon operation was well under way. The five divisions chosen were the 77th, 35th, 4th, 28th, and 82d. The 77th and 35th Divisions moved on June 11 from the British area to a reserve position back of the Vosges front. On June 17 the 82d Division moved from the British area to a reserve position in the vicinity of Toul. On June 11 the 28th Division moved from a British area to a reserve position in the vicinity of Ecouen, just northeast of Paris, while on June 12 the 4th Division moved from the British area to the vicinity of La Ferté-Sous-Jouarre, in the area back of the Marne front (135).

On July 11 the 27th, 30th, 33d, 78th, and 80th Divisions were in training and reserve in the British area. The 29th, 37th, 89th, 90th, and 92d Divisions were concentrated in the training area around American General Headquarters at Chaumont. The 32d, 35th, 5th, and 77th Divisions were in sector in the Vosges Mountains, brigaded with French divisions. The 82d Division was brigaded with French troops in the old American sector north of Toul. The infantry regiments of the 93d Division were in line with the French in the vicinity of the Argonne Forest, under French command (135).

All other American combat divisions in France were assembled or assembling about the Marne salient preparatory to the Aisne-Marne operation in which American divisions were to play such an important material part. The 42d Division was in support position east of Reims. The 3d and 26th Divisions were in line in the immediate neighborhood of Château-Thierry. The 2d, 4th, and 28th Divisions were in reserve immediately back of the Château-Thierry front with elements of the 28th Division in line. The 1st Division was moving south into the same vicinity (135).

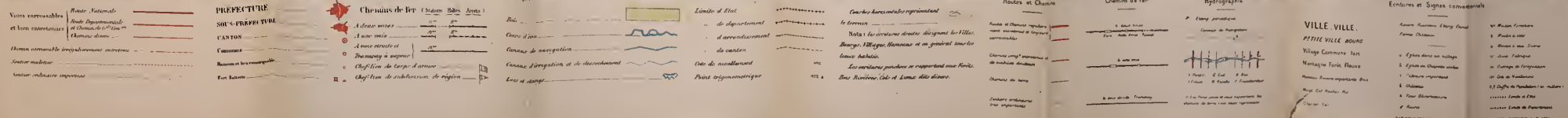


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